

PRODUCT CLOSE-UP



MPC MUSIC PERCUSSION COMPUTER

From the makers of *The Kit* comes the British-made *MPC Music Percussion Computer*. This drum machine is user-playable and can link up with a computer for graphic pattern displays. The *MPC* is housed in a foam-lined flight case with an adaptor underneath for a mic' stand. It is made up of eight drum pads plus a bank of controls. The pads are constructed of ABS plastic (like the material used on road cases) and are shaped in elongated octagons. They are touch-sensitive and are spring-based to approximate real drum-head response. Each pad has its own designated sound: bass, snare, tom-tom 1,2,3,4, open hi-hat and closed hi-hat. A flick of a switch changes these designations to bass, snare, tom-tom 3 and 4, cymbal, clap, open hi-hat and closed hi-hat, all with corresponding select LEDs. An overall "mute" button for dynamics is also included.

There are five groups of controls for the pads. The Toms section has controls for level, decay, pitch, bend, and head noise mix (stick attack); the Bass has level, decay, and pitch; the Snare section has level, decay, and snare noise (for tighter or looser sounds). The Cymbal controls are for level, decay, pitch, and tone, while the Hi-Hat controls adjust level, pitch, tone, and tightness. All sounds on the *MPC* are synthetic, not real, sounds—very close to the sounds on *The Kit* (reviewed in April '83). There are individual outputs for everything. A metronome click is also provided, using the hi-hat sound.

The *MPC* can record four rhythm groups of two bars each in real-time recording. Groups can sequence up to 199 events. There is also a facility for alternate bar lengths—two bars of 16 beats, two bars of 12, three bars of 12, and three bars of 16. The metronome will tick off every

MPC and Instant Replay

by Bob Saylowski, Jr.

three, four, six, or eight beats, depending on the bar length involved. However, not all bar lengths/time signatures will work, which is a little discouraging when you want to program some odd-time patterns. The unit also has a 16-key, on-board processor for controllable record, playback, tempo, bar length, time signature, sequence program, and accent program.

The idea of having playable pads on the unit allows simultaneous manual playing over or without the programmed rhythms. It should be noted that tom-toms 1 and 2 do *not* record; they are for play only. So you could record with two toms, and then use the pads for a "live overdub" using all four toms. Also, any beat recorded on the cymbal/clap pad can be played back as either a cymbal or a handclap. Various other controls and jacks on the *MPC* include master mix/output level, headphone level, stereo mix output socket, and headphone socket. The unit has a sync input and output for linking two *MPCs* or other drum machines, plus it will sync to and from tape.

Comparing this unit to other machines like the Linn, Oberheim, E-Mu, etc., I have found two major points: (1) After hearing the digital sounds on the other machines, the *MPC*'s synthetic sounds are a bit of a disappointment—unless you expressly want the synthetically produced drum sounds. (2) There are more "fine-tuning" controls on the *MPC*, but its system of programming is somewhat limited, and at first, difficult to get used to.

While playing the pads, I found there to be an annoying impact click of the sticks against the plastic pads. The manufacturer does include rubber insulators to fit over your drumstick tips, but it seems they only fit certain stick sizes. What really makes this unit different from all the others is its capacity to interface with a computer (namely the Timex-Sinclair 1000) for a graphic display of drum patterns. Using the computer also allows for increased storage and more complex pattern programs. When linked to the *T-1000* and its 16K *Rampack*, memory capability is increased to 26 different bars of rhythms, containing up to 20 beats each.

After you hook it up to your television, the first display you see will be the "Master Directory"—a menu from which you choose to work on bars, sequences, songs, dumping to tape, loading from tape, or downloading from the computer to the *MPC*. For explanation's sake, let's choose to compose Bars. A different display now comes up on the TV screen, having one block for Bar A and one for Bar B. Each voice on the *MPC* is shown by a plotting line made up of 16 dots, which I assume are to be thought of as 16th notes. Wherever you want a beat played, you must move the computer's cursor (shown on the screen) to that location and then press the "plot" key on the computer keypad to write it in. To write a snare backbeat on "2" and "4," the cursor would have to be moved to Dot 5, and then to Dot 13. By doing this, you are actually "writing music." After you get through with your composing, there is an option to add accents to beats (all voices at that beat will be accented), and if you desire, bars may be copied. An alternate method of writing beats is simply to tap the drum pad corresponding to the sound you want after you get the cursor into location.

To write sequences, another display is shown, giving eight lines of eight bars. To write songs, there is yet a different display. The computer also allows tempo adjustment, erasure of beats and bars, and playback. With the 16K *Rampack*, bars can also contract or expand for different time signatures (one to twenty steps).

The addition of the Timex-Sinclair increases the versatility of the *MPC* and makes it most interesting from an educational standpoint. It is a bit limited when trying to write odd groupings such as five over two, and for that matter, even triplets. For basic beats, it works out just fine. The manufacturer has plans for future extension to external stage pads, removed from the "brain," which would certainly make the unit worthy of live playing.

The *MPC* retails at \$1,300; the computer interface lists at \$130. (You must supply the Timex-Sinclair and TV.) For more info, write: On-Site Energy Systems, 3000 Marcus Ave, Suite 2W7, Lake Success, NY 11042. (516) 775-5510.



ELECTRO-HARMONIX INSTANT REPLAY

Instant Replay is a new innovation from the people at Electro-Harmonix. This unit is capable of digitally recording and reproducing any sound at all up to two seconds in length. The unit comes in two separate pieces—the control board and an external trigger pad. The controls are simple: variable pitch/speed, pad sensitivity, mic' input level, and record function button (with an LED). The unit has a single mic' input, a 1/4" output jack, plus jacks for external triggering and synthesizer interface. The pitch control also works as a tempo control when playing back in repeat mode. The trigger pad is similar to their *Space Drum* pad, being a circular rubber disc mounted in a metal box, with a 1/4" input jack on the back to feed from the control board's signal. Hardware is provided to mount the trigger pad onto *Rototom* or cymbal stands.

Instant Replay will accept any sound from a microphone or electronic instrument, record it, and then play it back on command, either as a continuous loop or just once. The possibilities are limitless: handclaps, Simmons snare, gong, trains, barking dog—anything! All sounds, once recorded, are very true-to-life.

One problem with the unit, however, is that it is AC-powered and has no back-up battery for storage. This means that once the power is disconnected, the sound is lost forever and must be re-recorded. Now, how will you record that perfect dog bark again when you're setting up on a gig? One possibility is first to tape the sound you want onto a good-quality cassette recorder, and then load it into the unit (after setting up on stage) via a good portable cassette player. The noise level is increased a bit, but with a little patience it does work.

For easier use, perhaps Electro-Harmonix will come up with a second version with memory back-up, and separate pitch and tempo controls. *Instant Replay* is a fun little unit, capable of giving sounds in live performance which, up until now, were not quite possible. Retail: \$299.00

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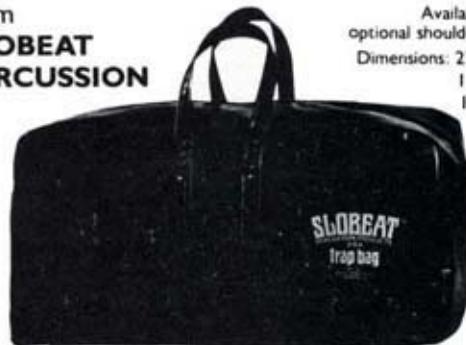
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